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To the editor:

We believe that your obituary on January 17 is an incomplete memorial to Professor Bernard D. Davis, and therefore needs to be amended to give a true picture of this outstanding figure, who influenced an entire generation of biomedical scientists by his research and by his teaching and writing. His accomplishments go far beyond those noted in your obituary.

In his academic career, Dr. Davis was first chairman of the Department of Pharmacology at New York University School of Medicine and then Chairman of the Department of Bacteriology and Immunology at Harvard Medical School. Early in his career as a scientist, in 1948, he discovered a method for isolating bacterial mutants that was instrumental in the subsequent spectacular developments in microbial genetics and molecular biology and the recent growth of genetic engineering and biotechnology. This discovery and his subsequent research on biosynthetic pathways and on mechanisms of antibiotic action and drug resistance led to Dr. Davis' election to membership in the National Academy of Science and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Dr. Davis was an extraordinarily gifted teacher and his lectures to medical students were models of analytic precision and clarity. He also was the senior author of an exemplary textbook of Microbiology, and was the first one to emphasize fundamental biochemical mechanisms. This book had a strong and lasting influence on the teaching of microbiology in medical schools in the United States and abroad.

Throughout his life, Dr. Davis was concerned with the impact of science on society and wrote in a clear and rational manner on a variety of issues, including the imagined dangers of recombinant DNA and the excessive controls exerted by the government on the conduct of scientific research. He did not hesitate to take on politically or socially sensitive issues, although his views may have distanced him from some of his colleagues. Among these was an unpopular opinion he voiced in 1976 as to the impact of affirmative action on standards of medical education, selected by Eric Pace as the focus of his obituary article. We hope that this letter will convey a clearer impression of a striking personality who had an important impact on the science of our time.